

Green Mountain National Forest, to establish the Conte National Wildlife Refuge, and to forever preserve large swaths of the Appalachian and Long Trails. These are treasures today, preserved for future generations.

Across the country, the Land and Water Conservation Fund has been valued as America's premier conservation program—an outgrowth of what has been called “America's Best Idea,” the creation of our National Park System. It has drawn strong bipartisan support for half a century, even as the political atmosphere has become more divisive. I recently led a bipartisan coalition of 53 Senators representing every corner of the Nation in asking for a short-term extension of the LWCF and a commitment to work to permanently authorize and fund the program. We sent a similar letter calling on Majority Leader MCCONNELL and Minority Leader REID to support permanent funding for the program, which was followed by a similar bipartisan letter from members of the House to Speaker BOEHNER.

But despite this strong bipartisan and bicameral support, there are those who seek to throw this longstanding, commonsense program out the window, shutting down one of the few reliable sources that fund conservation work across the country, a truly devastating bid that threatens our land and water and our local economies. It makes no sense.

Several times last week, opponents of the widely popular LWCF objected to extending its authorization, claiming that the fund was used to purchase privately held land from landowners. But that is precisely what the fund is intended to support: the purchase of land from willing sellers interested in seeing land protected rather than developed. Often these land deals include land exchanges, thus ensuring that the Nation's most sensitive lands are not developed, while ensuring that other working lands remain privately owned.

Too often we see these deals evaporate because the funding is not there. This is why we need to ensure the fund is permanently authorized and fully funded. These projects should not slip away, as we have seen in Vermont and other parts of the country, because of a fundamental misunderstanding of how the fund operates and how it is supported.

We have watched conservation funding wither across the country while developments encroach our precious national parks and while the real threat of climate change draws closer and closer. Now is not the time to break a commitment to conserve our natural resources, our heritage, and the legacy we will hand to our children and grandchildren. We must value and protect our heritage by renewing the Land and Water Conservation Fund.

CONFIRMATION OF DALE DROZD

Mrs. FEINSTEIN. Mr. President, I rise in strong support of the confirma-

tion of Dale Drozd to the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of California.

Judge Drozd earned his bachelor's degree magna cum laude from San Diego State University in 1977 and his law degree from UCLA in 1980, where he was inducted into the Order of the Coif.

He began his legal career as a law clerk for a district judge in the same judicial district where he now serves.

Following his clerkship, Judge Drozd worked as a criminal and civil litigator in Federal and State courts at the trial and appellate levels for 14 years.

Then, in 1997, Judge Drozd was appointed to serve as a magistrate judge in the Eastern District of California.

In 2011, he became the chief magistrate judge in that court.

Over his 18-year career as a magistrate judge, he has presided over thousands of cases.

He is well regarded in the legal community and among those who appear before him on a daily basis. The ABA has rated Judge Drozd “well qualified,” its highest rating.

Five different U.S. attorneys who served under both Republican and Democratic administrations over more than 20 years have endorsed his nomination.

Those former U.S. attorneys include David F. Levi, who later served on the district court and is now dean of Duke law school, as well as George O'Connell, Charles Stevens, Paul Seave, and McGregor Scott.

Their letter states: “[w]e have all known Judge Drozd for many years and are also aware of his judicial reputation in the community. He is an effective, productive, fair, and balanced jurist who is widely respected in this district.”

Their letter further recognized Judge Drozd as “an outstanding magistrate judge,” and went on to state that “he will be equally effective as a district judge.”

The president of the Sacramento chapter of the Federal Bar Association wrote to the Judiciary Committee in support of this nomination.

That letter notes that, although it is not typical for the Federal Bar Association “to endorse a particular candidate or nomination,” Judge Drozd's nomination is “uniquely easy to support.”

The letter further stated that Judge Drozd “is widely respected in our district and commands a high level of respect from attorneys who appear before him.”

I would also add a point from the U.S. attorneys' letter about the crushing caseload in this district.

Their letter states: “[o]ur district has an extremely heavy case load and has been operating with a vacant judgeship for two and a half years. It is vitally important to the fair administration of justice that the long-vacant judicial vacancy in our Fresno district be promptly filled.”

This is a point that bears repeating: the caseload in the Eastern District of

California is extraordinarily large, and has been for many years.

This district covers Sacramento and California's Central Valley, including Fresno and Bakersfield—it covers 55 percent of California's land area.

The district has only six judgeships for a population of nearly 8 million people, and it has almost two times as many people per judgeship as the average U.S. district court.

Over the last 6 years, the court has had nearly three times as many pending cases per judgeship—more than 1400—than the national average, 569.

These numbers translate into lengthy times for cases to be resolved. Over the last several years, it has taken between 38 and 51 months for civil cases to get to trial—well above the national average of 26 months.

Criminal cases now take over 20 months to be resolved currently, almost three times the national average of 7.4 months.

The point is this: the Eastern District of California is in serious need of additional judges. I have worked for many years to create those positions, and I believe very strongly that they are needed.

I am pleased that the Senate took the step of voting on this nomination.

Thank you.

ADDITIONAL STATEMENTS

IDAHO HOMETOWN HERO MEDAL

• Mr. CRAPO. Mr. President, I wish to honor the 2015 Idaho Hometown Hero Medalists in the fifth year of the presentation of this recognition.

The Idaho Hometown Hero Medal celebrates those working for the betterment of our communities. Drs. Fahim and Naeem Rahim established the recognition to honor individuals who embody the spirit of philanthropy while showing remarkable commitment in both their personal and professional lives. I congratulate the 2015 award recipients and commend the Rahim brothers, the award's committee members, the cosponsors, volunteers, and other organizations supporting this honor for partnering to highlight good works.

Ten exceptional Idahoans from communities across our great State are 2015 Hometown Hero Medal recipients. Marianna Budnikova, of Boise, started two nonprofits to help girls take part in technology and pursue careers in computer sciences. Carrie French, of Caldwell, is being awarded posthumously for her dedicated, courageous service to our Nation. She enlisted in the U.S. Army at the age of 19 and died serving bravely in the Iraq war. Tiara Lusk, an ex-policewoman from Sugar City, started two initiatives to help women who are victims of domestic abuse and started a training program to help women enlist in the police force.